With compliments from
the Author

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A

FEW REMARKS

ON

SLUGGISH MENTAL DEVELOPMENT,

EDUCATIONALLY CONSIDERED.

BY

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Ex his enim, similibusque, sæpe curandi nova ratio ducenda est.
CELSUS.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

A FEW preliminary remarks may be necessary, to account for the appearance of the following pages.

For many years I have been engaged in verifying, on a small scale, and in a private manner, the correctness of the system therein advanced. The results having proved satisfactory in every case, several gentlemen of great scholastic and medical experience and reputation, have urged upon me the desirability of making it public, and of extending its sphere of usefulness.

With this view, I submit the following remarks to the consideration and judgment of those competent to form a correct estimate of the value and usefulness of the system proposed.

W. H. M.

Avenue Lodge, Ham Common, Surrey,
November 1868.

ON

MENTAL DEVELOPMENT,

EDUCATIONALLY CONSIDERED.

Progress of the educational system.

Those who are interested in, and have watched the progress of education in this country during the last forty years, must have marked the vast improvements which have been introduced into our educational system, whether as regards the higher or the lower classes.

Where deficient.

Amongst these improvements one branch of the subject, and that a most important one, has been entirely overlooked. No system adapted to the *requirements of slow and sluggish intellects* has been advocated. Public men and heads of schools have been engrossed in perfecting the curriculum of class education and teaching, to meet the now universal rule of competitive examination.

Class education.

Former standard.

That these efforts have been successful cannot be doubted. Any one who has reached the decline of life, must be startled when reflecting on what general education was in his youth, and what it is now. The standard then required for membership at the universities, for the law, for the army, in short for all the liberal pro-

fessions, was very different from what it is at the present day.

Maximum now required

Whether, in seeking to attain a maximum of knowledge, the system has not been carried too far—whether, in other words, all average minds are able to reach *at a given age* the standard requisite to ensure the chance of success, need not be discussed. It is foreign to our subject. This question has received some public attention, and will doubtless receive much more. But, however opinions may differ on this point, it is a fact beyond dispute, and within the experience of all concerned in large educational establishments, that there are many individuals who are not only unable to attain this proficiency, but are physically incapacitated from mastering even the usual class work of youths of their own age. These, with every will to work and devoting all their energies to the task, find themselves stationary. They never rise in rank, are too often the butt and derision of their school-mates; and fortunate are they if those in authority discern the want of mental power, and meet the case with sympathy, and not with punishment.

not attainable by all.

The effects on some minds.

That discipline must sometimes be inflicted is inevitable, from the very essence of the scholastic system; it is so difficult to distinguish between *wilful idleness* with mental capacity, and *involuntary default* from mental incapacity.

Class teaching the only practical system.

Class teaching must prevail as the rule; no other system could be devised that would produce the same general results. Without it, emulation would be dead. By it, average intellects will best be taught. But where the brain, though free from actual disease, is in an abnormal

Where the system fails.

state, where there is a slow mental development—let the cause arise from what it may—then the system fails altogether. As well might a lame child be expected to run a race on equal terms with one of vigorous limbs, as a child with a sluggish mental organization be called on to keep pace with one that has an active and healthy brain.

The class system cannot be modified to include all cases.

It may be asked by the casual observer, whether the class system could not be modified to meet such cases. The reply is obvious. You cannot make exceptional rules without impairing discipline. Boys are not philosophers to see and admit the justice of relaxation in the one case, and exaction in the other. In their eyes the boy is *a dunce*, and ought to be punished rather than excused. No; the class work *must* be accomplished; and the only possible plan is to place the child in that position where, irrespective of age, he is likely to master it.

The effects of persisting in it.

We need not go beyond the family circle, where such cases exist, for evidence of the futility of attempting to enforce, however gently, the usual educational course. But if we trace the effects that supervene in schools where the class system has been persisted in, and the intellect kept constantly on the strain to try and accomplish an impossibility, we have no difficulty in understanding what must and does follow. There will be mental and bodily prostration in the more favourable cases; idiotey, insanity, and even death in the more unfavourable. It would be as painful as unnecessary to quote cases illustrative of these results.

The results which follow.

A system of education suited to such cases.

If such be the facts (and no one will, I think, dispute them), the question arises, Can any system be propounded,

and, if so, what system, which shall supply this defect in the educational course, and best develop the dormant or sluggish intellect?

The brain always capable of healthy impressions

That such a system is not only feasible, but that there are very few cases indeed, if any, in which the brain is so hopelessly sterile as to be incapable, under judicious treatment, of some mental development, the result of thirty years' study of the subject has fully confirmed. True, it must always be a question of degree, but still one of decided progress.

where no disease exists.

It must be clearly understood that such a system can only apply to those cases where there is no organic lesion (disease), no malconformation of the brain. That much may be done for imbecile cases is now proved by the results obtained at the Earlswood Asylum for Idiots; but none such are here contemplated. The system applies *only* to those cases where the *mental development is not sufficiently active to meet the requirements of the school class system.* Indeed it may be carried still higher, and applied to those cases where the brain cannot advance *simultaneously* in all the branches of an ordinary educational course, without previous assistance and training.

To what cases the system applies.

Causes of slow development.

Although the system is founded on psychological and physiological data, it will not be necessary for our present purpose to explain the causes which contribute such cases. They result from, and are dependent on, various contingencies, none of which need, I am firmly convinced, preclude, under judicious treatment, a gradual and apparent, if not a high order of intellectual attainment.

Physiological conside-

It may, however, be desirable to state a few physiolo-

gieal propositions bearing on the praetieal view of the subjeet, and appreeiable to the general reader. rations in connexion with the subject.

1. The brain being the seat of knowledge, anything that impairs its free aetion, must be detrimental to intelleetual progress.

2. That the healthy development of the body must, to a eertain extent, though not of neeessity, promote the same in the brain. Henee the old maxim, "Mens sana in eorpore sano," as the perfection of the mental and physieal development of the human organization.

3. That mental development does not progress in the same ratio, at given ages, in all healthy brains. In some it is preeoeious, in others it is normal, in others it is sluggish, in others it remains undeveloped.

From the foregoing propositions we may deduee the following eonelusion :—

That, as the normal development of the intelleet eannot eope with the preeocious, nor is it expeeted to do so, so the sluggish intelleet eannot keep paee with the normal, although *it is* required to do so, not only to meet the class-work of the sehool, but to realize the expeetation of parents at home. Practical result of the above.

And here we have another proof of the utter failure of the class system to meet these eases. How many a parent has parted with a ehild believing that the sluggish development, even if recognized, whieh is not often the ease, resulted from home treatment and training, and that school would bring out the latent intellect. And yet how great has been the vexation and disappointment on the child's return, at not finding those hopes realized. The Cause of school failures.

The school system not in fault.

failure is perhaps attributed to neglect, whereas the master to whom the child had been confided had conscientiously discharged his duty, and endeavoured, though in vain, to urge on the intellect to keep pace with others of the same age. Ignoring the true cause, the child is often sent to another school, where a sterner discipline prevails. Coercion only makes matters worse, and the unfortunate child perchance reaches manhood an idiot. This is no over-coloured picture.

How common it is to hear of a dull child, a stupid child, a dunce, where no thought is given to the real cause. There is more meaning and sense in the old proverb, that "a man is a fool or a physician at forty," than is generally understood.

The system proposed.

The system proposed, and which experience has proved to be eminently successful, may be summed up in a few words. It consists—

Its mode of action.

1. In ascertaining in what channel there is any sign of intellectual progress, and in *individual* teaching, or rather *explaining,* to draw out by degrees the mental powers. Ordinary education must at first be entirely discarded. The opening may present itself in a channel least expected, *the most opposed* to it. It is only when the mind has been drawn out by constant help—when the intellect, or rather the reflective faculties, have passed from a dormant to an active state, never being allowed to get confused over difficulties, that the usual class system can be resorted to.

Mental progress.

Physical development.

2. In a strict attention to the physical development of the body. By this I do not mean merely the health of the child—this is properly attended to in all well-regulated

schools—but a healthy development physiologically considered.

The system not defective.

It may be said that a system which is only available for the upper classes on account of the expense, must be defective. The reply is simple, and will prove the strongest argument that can be advanced against the practice of urging on the education of the young indiscriminately, and without reference to their mental capacities.

The lower orders exempt.

The children of the lower orders are, as a rule, free from sluggish mental development, in spite of the many physical and hygienic disadvantages under which they labour. In the ranks of the artisan, or, in a more extended sense, that class comprised under the head of "skilled labour," there exists no necessity for what I must call *a forcing* of the intellect. Until the age of nine or ten, their education is purely elementary, nothing is required beyond what the normal condition of the brain is quite capable of mastering. Not so with the child in the higher ranks; at that age it is expected to have made considerable progress in its educational course.

Cause of exemption.

Again, the artisan, until the age of fourteen, only works at the mechanical part of his handicraft; it is only after that age that he applies himself, slowly and by degrees, to the more intricate portion of his craft, that requires mental activity; but even then there is a combination, or rather a division between the mechanical and mental requirements, the physical acting as a corrective to the mental strain. But there is no such relief in the education of the higher classes. It is a constant and unrelaxing strain on the brain; it is all head-work of the most trying and

perplexing nature. Granted that ninety out of every hundred can bear that strain without injury to the brain; still, the other ten cannot; and it is to and for them that the system applies.

Conclusion.

The above outline of cause and effect, of treatment and result, will be sufficient for our present purpose. I will add but one concluding remark. In treating the subject of Slow Mental Development I have not spoken of individual cases. There must always be a great diversity, from the highest type of sluggish development, requiring only a slight and temporary assistance, to the lowest or least developed, requiring a constant and careful training. In all cases the same system applies; but, as I have said before, the results must always be a question of degree.

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